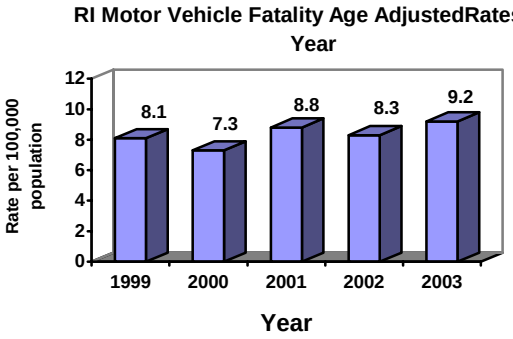
MOTOR VEHICLE/TRANSPORTATION INJURY PREVENTION

Prevent Motor Vehicle Crash Injuries and Deaths

Annually, over 90 people are killed on the state's roads. [1] Many more than that are hospitalized yearly due to an injury resulting from a traffic collision. The economic burden of motor vehicle crashes in Rhode Island is considerable, with costs reaching almost one-billion dollars during the year 2000. [2] Motor vehicle crashes (MVC) are the leading cause of death overall for state residents aged 10-24, and are the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for Rhode Islanders ages 10-64[1]. Fatality rates in Rhode Island due to motor vehicle related injuries appear to be increasing (Figure 1). From 2002 to 2003, while 27 states showed MVC fatality decreases, Rhode Island showed an increase in MVC fatalities [2]

Figure 1

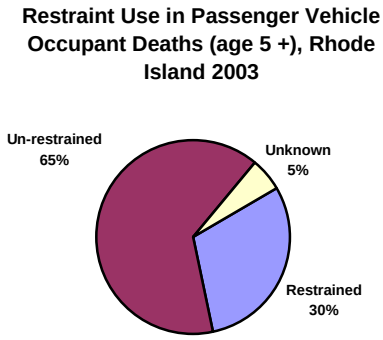


Data Source: NHTSA, State Traffic Safety Information, 2003

Seat Belt Laws and Seat Belt Use

In 2003, a full 65% of traffic fatalities in Rhode Island involved unrestrained motorists (Figure 2). Primary safety belt laws increase safety belt use and reduce traffic fatalities. [3] Rhode Island currently has secondary enforcement of safety belt laws. Unlike primary enforcement, which allows law officers to stop motorists for failing to wear a seat belt, secondary enforcement permits citation for failure to buckle up only when a driver is stopped for some other violation..

Figure 2



Drastic differences in safety belt usage rates are observed between states with primary verses secondary enforcement of safety belt laws. During the year 2003, the seat belt use rate in Rhode Island was only 74%, whereas in California, a primary safety belt law state, a full 91% of motorists wore their seat belt. [3]

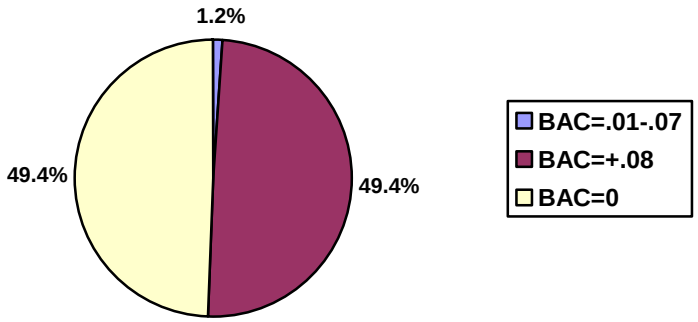
Among Rhode Island high school students the news is not good. A 2004 University of RI survey found that, compared to Rhode Islanders of all ages, fewer high school students wear their seat belts while riding in a car, with only 69.5% of respondents reporting that they buckle up. [4]

Alcohol Use

Alcohol use increases the risk of injuries. Alcohol has been a factor in a substantial proportion of the injuries and deaths from falls, homicide, suicide, and domestic violence, and is one of the key risk factors for motor vehicle crashes. In 2004, Rhode Island had the highest percent of alcohol-related fatal crashes in the country 50.6%(Figure 3), far surpassing the national figure of 39.0%. [5] Individuals under the age of 21 are more likely to be involved in fatal crashes compared to older adults. [7] Alcohol use increases their already high risk for sustaining a fatal motor vehicle related injury. According to a statewide survey of Rhode Island high school students, more than 33% reported riding in a car with a drinking driver, and one in five male students reported driving while they had been drinking. [6] Although nationally the largest decrease in alcohol-related fatal crashes appears among individuals under the age of 21 [7], the number of young Rhode Islanders reporting that they drink alcohol while driving remains alarmingly high.

Figure 3

Percentage of Alcohol-Related Fatal Motor Vehicle Crashes (MVC), by Blood Alcohol Content (BAC), Rhode Island, 2004



Data Source: NHTSA, State Traffic Safety Information, 2004

For more information, please contact:
Safe RI Violence and Injury Prevention Program
3 Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02903
http://www.health.ri.gov/disease/saferi/index.php
Email: beatriz.perez@health.ri.gov

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2005) {cited: May 2005}. Available from: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars
2. National Highway Transportation Safety Association, State Traffic Safety Information [online], (2003) {Cited: June 2005}. Available from: http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/nrd-30/ncsa/
3. Impact of Primary Laws on Adult Use of Safety Belts – United States, 2002; MMWR, April 2, 2004 / 53(12): 257 – 260
4. Berman, Schaffran, and Fong; December 2004; Safety Belt Usage Rates at High Schools and Colleges in Rhode Island; University of Rhode Island Transportation Center;
5. National Highway Transportation Safety Association, Traffic Safety Facts 2003, Alcohol Related Crashes and Fatalities, Available from: http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/TSF2003/809761.pdf
6. Personal Safety, Depression, and Attempted Suicide: Health Risks among Rhode Island Public High School Students, RI Youth Risk Behavior Survey 1997 and 2001, RI Department of Education in Collaboration with the RI Department of Health, Available from: http://www.health.ri.gov/chic/statistics/RIYRBS_97-01personalsafety.pdf
7. Involvement by Young Drivers in Fatal Alcohol-related Motor Vehicle Crashes – United States, 1982 - 2001; MMWR, December 6, 2002 / 51(48): 1089 – 1091